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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Leading media reported that the White House is making a last-minute diplomatic effort to come up with some significant statement signaling the revival of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks to conclude the tripartite summit in New York today. However, yesterday White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said the administration has no

"grand expectations" for President Barack Obama's meeting with the Israeli and Palestinian leaders. Israel Radio reported that PA President Mahmoud Abbas met in New York with U.S. Special Envoy Senator George Mitchell and also with representatives of Arab states.

Electronic media reported that this morning, in comments made to high-school students, President Shimon Peres dismissed the "low expectations" attributed to the upcoming summit and declared hope that the meeting could yield a resumption of stalled peace negotiations.

HaQaretz quoted diplomatic sources in Jerusalem as saying that President Obama may declare a temporary freeze of construction in the settlements; another possibility would be a proclamation about the resumption of the negotiations in mid-October; Obama may call for the convening of an international peace conference in coming months.

HaQaretz reported that PM Benjamin Netanyahu could not have hoped for a more comfortable political atmosphere for his trip to New York for the three-way summit. The vocal Likud rebels have been keeping relatively quiet, and none of his "ideological" ministers have come out and said anything against him. In general, the attitude on the Right is that Netanyahu has managed to withstand President Abbas's pressure and is heading to the summit without preconditions. The only real exception to the quiet was from Minister without Portfolio Benny Begin (Likud) and the people in the settlers' protest tent outside the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem, including settler leader Danny Dayan. HaQaretz also reported that Yisrael Beiteinu was silent. The Jerusalem Post emphasized division among Likud over Netanyahu's diplomatic effort, as one of its Knesset members, Danny Dannon, is protesting in New York. Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat was quoted as saying in an interview with Makor Rishon-Hatzofe that the Palestinians' goal at the summit is to obtain from Netanyahu an unequivocal decision regarding the freeze of construction in the settlements and to inform the U.S. President about the Palestinians' frustration over Netanyahu's policy and positions.

Major media reported that Israel is calling upon the U.N.'s member states to boycott Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's speech at the General Assembly. Yediot and Israel Radio cited the response of most countries that their attitude will depend on the contents of Ahmadinejad's remarks. The Jerusalem Post reported that Gabriela Shalev, Israel's Ambassador to the U.N., told the newspaper, "Our main goal at this crucial time is to show the world how dangerous Iran is." She was further quoted as saying, "We stress and we emphasize that Iran is not only a threat to Israel, it's a global threat." The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday, in an interview with Reuters, Deputy FM Daniel Ayalon insisted that the military option against Tehran was still on the table, rejecting comments to the contrary made by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and published on Sunday.

HaQaretz reported on land clearing for 80 homes in a neighborhood in the West Bank settlement of Beitar Illit, which the newspaper says were not included in DM Ehud Barak's 455 retroactive approvals. In an unrelated story, the electronic media reported that this morning IDF troops shot dead an Israeli Arab who tried to force a barrage in Beitar Illit.

Israel Radio quoted former U.S. President Bill Clinton as saying that the settlements are the main obstacle to a peace agreement.

Yediot reported that President Shimon Peres, PM Netanyahu, FM Avigdor Lieberman, DM Ehud Barak, and Deputy FM Daniel Ayalon have made phone calls critical of the Goldstone report to major heads of state and government including to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Justice Richard Goldstone was quoted as saying in an interview with Channel 2-TV that Israeli officers who gave orders that can be construed as war crimes should be held responsible for their acts.

Yesterday, HaQaretz and other media reported that, for the first

time in 18 years, the U.S. and other Western powers were unsuccessful at preventing the passage of a resolution at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) calling on Israel to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The resolution also demands that Israel open its nuclear reactor in Dimona to international inspectors. Israel did, however, manage to thwart a proposal by Iran to prohibit any member of the IAEA from attacking the nuclear facilities of another member.

HaQaretz reported that the Israeli Education Ministry will be reexamining a new Hebrew-language textbook that was approved for 11th and 12th-grade classes, which includes the concept of Qethnic cleansingQ to describe what happened to the Palestinians in 1948.

HaQaretz quoted a World Bank report for a conference being held today in New York that the PA is facing a \$400 million financing gap for 2009.

Maariv reported that a compromise has been reached in the affair of Israeli mogul Lev LevievQs company Africa IsraelQs \$711 million debt to The New York Times: while the newspaperQs owners will give up on \$350 million, Africa Israel will immediately inject capital into The Times. Leviev had bought the NYT building at the height of the boom.

Mideast:

Block Quotes:

I. "Taking It One Step at a Time"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning HaQaretz (9/22): QThe tripartite summit meeting to be convened in New York Tuesday by U.S. President Barack Obama with his Israeli and Palestinian counterparts underscores the discrepancies between the mentalities of Jerusalem and Washington. Israelis expected (some hopefully and others fearfully) that Obama would reveal a peace plan, and push Benjamin Netanyahu and Mahmoud Abbas into working out the nitty-gritty.... But Americans work at a different pace than Israelis. Obama didn't promise to present a quick solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. He promised he would be more involved than George W. Bush, and work toward reviving the peace process. Obama has thus far made good on his promises: He appointed George Mitchell special envoy to the Mideast, and Tuesday will meet with leaders on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian divide for the first time since Netanyahu returned to power. Neither Netanyahu nor Abbas will be overawed by what Obama says, but they also won't be able to refuse him.

II. "Wobbling Washington"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (9/22): QForgive us our skepticism at this dawn of a new year, but lately the Obama administration has come to seem like something other than the clear-headed captain at the confident helm of the free world.... By ratcheting up his demands of Israel beyond the point of viable agreement, and then failing to obtain any substantive concessions from Arab leaders or the Palestinians in exchange, Obama actually walked into the most basic of Middle East peacemaking traps -- encouraging the instinctive Arab resort to intransigence. After all, how could the Palestinians now demand less of the Israelis than the Americans? And with a full-blown diplomatic crisis apparently under way between Israel and America, what interest could Arab leaders have in ending the crisis through a diplomatic breakthrough?

We might well ask why the administration is convinced that peace is being held up by settlements. Dozens of settlements have been dismantled and tens of thousands of settlers have been resettled in the Israeli withdrawals from Gaza and Sinai, while Palestinian rejectin has only increased in response to apparent Israeli weakness. In a world that is wondering increaingly whether Washington is willing and able to nforce its key values and

effectively promote its vital interests, Obama today plays host to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. And they will both be asking themselves a question neither would have anticipated eight months ago: Can America be relied upon and taken seriously? That uncertainty can only further undermine the prospects for a substantive Israeli-Palestinian breakthrough -- a breakthrough all three players at today's summit profess to fervently desire.

III. QJust Not Another Meaningless Summit

Former Meretz leader, former Justice Minister, and chief Israeli promoter of the Geneva Initiative, Yossi Beilin, wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (9/22): QAbu Mazen and Netanyahu have no interest in looking as if they hurt Obama. Abu Mazen -- because essentially, Obama is his life-saver; Netanyahu -- because despite his preference for an American leader like Bush Jr., knows that Obama will be in the White House for several more years and he cannot succeed if they clash. It must be Obama's direct interest and the indirect interest of Netanyahu and Abu Mazen to ensure that when the summit finishes on Wednesday there is an agreement -- even just procedural -- regarding next steps: the duration of negotiations on permanent status arrangements, its location, the level of the negotiators, and milestones. If this is accompanied by a statement of principle by Obama in his speech at the U.N. General Assembly along with a photograph of Israeli-Palestinian agreement, this will be a pleasant end to a dark chapter that began exactly nine years ago and which stopped, in practice, serious negotiations for an Israeli-Palestinian peace.

IV. "The Obama Show"

Conservative columnist Amos Carmel wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (9/22): QAt this juncture there are no indications that [President Obama] is succeeding better than his predecessor, in putting North Korea in its place, in containing Iran's nuclearization, or in disentangling from the Afghan quagmire.

Neither have we seen him until now extract gestures from the Saudis or heard any tangible idea about how to reach, as he said in Cairo, Qtwo states, where which Israelis and Palestinians each live in peace and security.Q Meanwhile, unfortunately, today's Qphoto-op suggestion looks like a part of his routine.

IV. "He Knows Better Now"

Columnist Shmuel Rosner, who was HaQaretz's correspondent in Washington, wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (9/22): QSince he was elected, Obama made the same mistake as every president before him -- in his great eagerness to prove that Qhe is not Bush,Q he forgot to check what was worthwhile to learn from his predecessor -- for instance that there are no shortcuts. After all, Obama did not even obtain a settlement freeze. Bush saw Israel fold dozens of settlements. Of course what will happen today in New York cannot be viewed as the funeral of the peace process. This will be a meeting and more will come. The sides will eventually engage in a cycle of talking or shooting or both. What will be interred at this funeral will be the exaggerated confidence of a young, bright, and charismatic president who somehow assumed that he knew better in this domain, too. It must be hoped that he really knows better now.

VI. QImpossible Deal

Middle East affairs commentator Dr. Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in Yediot Aharonot (9/22): QBecause it fears that a [prisoner-exchange] deal could go through, Hamas has raised the price, knowing that no country in the world can agree to its terms. Now Hamas is not only talking about freeing prisoners. It wants national, security and political achievements from Israel, which are completely opposed to Israel's interests. It has never yet happened in the course of history that in exchange for one person -- important as he may be -- that a state paid with its vital and existential interests. What is Hamas asking for now, in addition to the list of prisoners, some of them highly dangerous? For all the crossings between Israel and Gaza to be permanently opened; to remove the siege from the air, sea and land, i.e. the Gaza Port would open so that Hamas would have a free port of its own for smuggling; for Israel to provide food to Gaza like in the past, in other words Israel would both feed this terrorist organization

and its population as if disengagement had never taken place (in this regard, Hamas has an inherent contradiction: at its request, the siege would be lifted, and it would be connected to the world, then why should Israel continue to feed it? But who cares about the subtleties); for there to be an international guarantee that Israel will not launch any future strikes on Gaza. In other words, they will shoot at Israel, but Israel will promise not to respond. Moreover, the IDF would be forbidden to enter Gaza for any reason in the future. With conditions such as those, there is not going to be any deal. Israel cannot and does not want a deal of this sort. Those exerting vocal street pressure on the government simply don't understand what is at stake. The greater their pressure, the price will only rise higher. The Egyptians don't want a deal either, since their mediation in the affair grants them centrality and importance.... In light of these assessments, the negotiations on Gilad Shalit have become a political means to garnering achievements, and it is liable to go on forever. Israel must stop these shameful talks and begin to take action itself. It is unthinkable that after so many years, the great IDF doesn't know where Gilad is being held. It is simply unthinkable.

VII. QGetting behind Obama

David Newman, Professor of Political Geography at Ben-Gurion University and Editor of the International Journal of Geopolitics, wrote in The Jerusalem Post (9/22): QDespite the window of opportunity that has presented itself for progressive Jewish organizations in the US, they have largely remained silent. They have the ear of the new American administration. They must not go the way of the Israeli peace movement and tone down their rhetoric because they mistakenly think the administration will carry out the job on their behalf. Israel's peace movement always made this mistake whenever a Labor government was in power.... Equally, it is time for Israeli governments and embassies throughout the world to work with the pro-peace lobbies instead of ignoring them.... Just as [The Jerusalem Post's liberal columnist Gershon] Baskin's call to the domestic peace constituency to wake up is critical, so too must our friends and allies in the American (and European) Jewish communities seize this opportunity. They must not remain silent. They must not let themselves be humbled into submission by an organized community which attempts to portray them negatively. Now is the time for them show their support of Israel by coming together, supporting President Obama and his Middle East envoy, and demonstrating to Israeli governments that there is an alternative way forward.

VIII. QConsequence of the Oslo Agreement: Annex the West Bank

Columnist Assaf Golan wrote in the editorial of the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe (9/22): QAt this time, the summit meeting between Barack Obama, Benjamin Netanyahu, and Abu Mazen looks like a grand funeral ceremony for the American's mediation efforts in the region.... Israel must embark on a new diplomatic initiative that will include the annexation of all of Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank] and the granting of maximal autonomy to the Palestinians.... Only thus can Israel stop the dangerous infiltration of Iranian agents into the region -- an infiltration that threatens peace in the entire Middle East and also directly and immediately harms patent American and European interests.

MORENO